



COASTAL HERITAGE

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 3

SPRING 2011

Carolina Diarist

The Broken World
of Mary Chesnut

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Mary Chesnut belonged to the slaveholding southern elite but hated slavery.

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PERSPECTIVE. Photographed with her husband, James, in 1840, Mary Chesnut became the Confederacy's most brilliant chronicler.

PHOTO/THE GRANGER COLLECTION

Carolina Diarist

The Broken World of Mary Chesnut

by John H. Tibbetts

Mary Chesnut studied her family's slaves while Fort Sumter burned a few miles away in Charleston Harbor. In the predawn hours of April 12, 1861—150 years ago—Confederate batteries thundered down shells on federal troops bunched in the fort.

In her celebrated Civil War journal, Mary Chesnut wondered what her family's slaves were thinking and feeling. Did they know that the new Confederate government claimed Fort Sumter? Did they hear freedom in those booming cannons?

"Not by one word or look can we detect any change in the demeanor of these negro servants," Mary wrote. "Laurence [her husband's valet] sits at our door, as sleepy and as respectful

and as profoundly indifferent. So are they all. They carry it too far. You could not tell that they even hear the awful row that is going on in the bay, though it is dinning in their ears day and night. And people talk before them as if they were chairs and tables. And they make no sign. Are they stolidly stupid or wiser than we, silent and strong, biding their time?"

Over the next four years of war, Mary tried to plumb the mysteries of Africans who surrounded her, but they remained inscrutable. Their apparent self-control troubled her. Did they plan to rebel? Flee north? "Their faces," she wrote, "are as unreadable as the sphinx."

Mary Chesnut was not always composed herself. She extolled south-

ern femininity ("Our women are soft and sweet—low-toned, indolent, graceful, quiescent."), but at times she couldn't meet her own standards of ladylike comportment. Mary Chesnut, when provoked, could be hot-tempered and sarcastic, but in public she held her tongue on one subject—slavery. Although her wealth and privilege were built on slavery, she loathed the South's peculiar institution.

"God, forgive us but ours is a monstrous system, and wrong and iniquity," she wrote in a March 1861 entry.

An aristocratic insider living in the heart of the Confederacy, Mary Chesnut was the daughter and the wife of U.S. senators from South Carolina who argued for states' rights

over slavery.

During South Carolina's sesquicentennial commemorations of the Civil War, there is no better time to acknowledge the greatest literary work of the Confederacy—Mary Chesnut's journal of 1861-1865, which she later expanded into an epic of 400,000 words.

Her book offers insights about the planter elite who overwhelmingly dominated South Carolina politics and culture, leading the state into secession and catastrophic war. It drives home (sometimes intentionally, sometimes not) the moral and intellectual failures of the southern master class.

Mary Chesnut's diary illuminates



Mary Chesnut wrote her original diary during the Civil War and extensively revised it years later.
PHOTO/SOUTH CAROLINIANA LIBRARY,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

the great irony of the rebellion. Southern secession hastened events that the rebels had initiated the war to prevent, events that the planter elite most feared—slave emancipation and the arming of black men. Confederates fought their revolution of 1861-1865 against the Union for one goal: to sustain mastery of the white over the black. The Civil War, however, unleashed energies among black Americans that had been suppressed for many generations.

By 1864, Union armies had swelled with black soldiers, the large majority of whom were emancipated

slaves. The Confederacy, meanwhile, was desperate for additional troops. Mary Chesnut wrote in her diary: “We have lost nearly all of our men, and we have no money . . . Our best and brightest are under the sod.”

Confederate leaders at times considered enlisting slaves and offering them emancipation as a reward. But that idea was quickly discarded. According to southern doctrine, black men—free or slave—lacked the courage and intelligence to cope with the demands of disciplined military action.

One Confederate leader, Howell Cobb, put it bluntly, “The day you make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. If slaves will make good soldiers, our whole theory of slavery is wrong.”

The southern secession crisis was sparked on November 6, 1860, when Abraham Lincoln, nominee of the anti-slavery Republican Party, was elected president. South Carolina's elite, believing that slavery was directly threatened, responded almost immediately. Mary's husband, James Chesnut, Jr., was the first U.S. senator in the South to resign in protest.

In Columbia, the S.C. General Assembly remained in session and called for elections to a state secession convention. On December 20, 1860, in

Charleston, the capital of southern extremism, all 169 delegates voted for secession. South Carolina became the first southern state to leave the Union, eventually followed by 10 more.

In February 1861, South Carolina joined the new Confederate States of America. And two months later, in April, the Confederacy began the Civil War by firing on Fort Sumter.

Serving as an aide to Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard, James Chesnut, Jr., set out at night across the harbor to relay evacuation demands to Major Robert Anderson of the fort's occupying Union force. Anderson refused to surrender, and Chesnut, after consulting with his superiors, gave orders to open fire.

“I knew my husband was rowing about in a boat somewhere in that dark bay,” Mrs. Chesnut wrote. “And that the shells were roofing it over—bursting toward the fort.” Mary, dreading war, made reference to Shakespeare's Macbeth, the Scottish king who killed for power in a blood-bath that ended with his death: “Sound and fury, signifying nothing. A delusion and a snare.”

After a day and half of shelling, Major Anderson surrendered the fort, and no one was killed—a bloodless battle in what would prove to be



BESIEGED. When Confederate batteries fired on Fort Sumter, Mary Chesnut worried about her husband in a “boat somewhere in that dark bay.”
IMAGE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

America's bloodiest war.

Mary Chesnut and her husband lived among the South's political and military elite in Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital, during a long stretch of the Civil War. James began the war as a colonel and served as an aide to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and later was promoted to brigadier general. The Chesnuts also entertained the southern elite at their family's plantations near Camden where 450 slaves lived and worked.

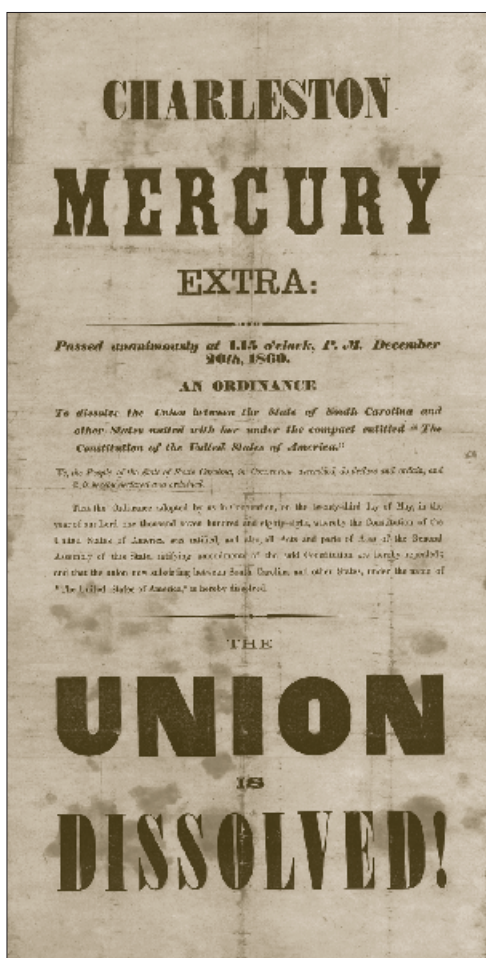
The Chesnuts belonged to the planter aristocracy that ruled the Deep South with unchallenged authority, and her diary captures their finer qualities—elegance, playfulness, physical bravery, and wit—but also their hubris and self-absorption.

In Richmond, Mary and her friends enjoyed day after day of gossip, flirtation, sumptuous meals, and amateur theatricals—until their circle of privilege was broken by losses of loved ones on the battlefield. Grief-devoured families might collapse around her, but Mary tried to go on. “It was awfully near—that thought of death—always—always—No—No—I will not stop and think.”

Mary's friends admired her sly, quicksilver intelligence and her conversation that flowed with warmth and humor. “Laughter,” she wrote, “is my forte.” But her ambitions always had to be filtered through her husband's opportunities, and she seethed when Confederate hotspurs commanded females to keep quiet in salon debates: “Silence—What do you know about war, woman?”

Although she never doubted her loyalty to the Confederacy, she bitterly criticized southern slave owners for dishonoring marriage and corroding family relationships.

Her gravest indignation was targeted at planters who had mistresses and “whitey brown” children living in slave quarters. “The mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in [everybody else's house



HEAR YE. This Charleston Mercury Extra heralded South Carolina's Ordinance of Secession passed unanimously on December 20, 1860.

IMAGE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

hold], but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think.”

Mary's father-in-law, a Camden planter, would not acknowledge his own mistress and mixed-race children. A devout Christian, Mary wished to obey the commandments and honor her husband's father. “How can I honor,” she asked herself, “what is so dishonorable or respect what is so little respectable, so disreputable—or love what is so utterly unlovely.”

Mary Chesnut wrote her original journal in spare moments during the war, and then set it aside. In the late 1870s, she picked up her manuscript again, revising, polishing, expanding, and embellishing. Until she died in 1886, she continued to write of events

that occurred years before, adding details apparently from memory.

Her journal was published in 1905 and 1949 in aggressively edited versions. Finally, in 1981, a full scholarly edition by historian C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, was published in a massive volume of 835 pages. It drew on her original journal and her many revisions, additions, and emendations. Nearly a century after Mary Chesnut's death, readers for the first time gained a full picture of this talented, morally torn South Carolinian living at the center of Confederate power, and her book won a Pulitzer Prize.

In Mary Chesnut's original 1860s journal, she is a woman of relatively progressive views about slavery considering her time and place, although her racial attitudes coarsened, turning ugly, in later revisions. By all accounts she treated slaves well. “Two-thirds of my religion consists in trying to be good to negroes because they are so in my power, and it would be so easy to be the other thing.”

Slaves, she understood, made her elegant life possible. “They save me all thought as to household matters, and they are so kind and attentive and quiet.” She viewed Laurence, her husband's valet, with particularly high regard. But she called Africans whom she did not know “horrid brutes—savages, monsters.”

She knew she was a tangle of paradoxes. Although she dreaded war, she called herself a “fire-eater” secessionist, impatient for South Carolina to leave the Union. She thrived on pampering by slaves yet despised slavery as a corrupting institution.

Under such crosswinds, her emotional weather could change in an instant. In late June 1861, just weeks into the war, her entry said: “Slavery has to go, of course—and joy go with it.” Mary seemed reconciled to losing her way of life if slavery disappeared. Yet the next moment she turned defiant. “These Yankees may kill us and lay waste the land for a while, but conquer us? Never!”

1807-08 Britain bans its transatlantic slave trade and the United States bans slave imports.	1820 Missouri Compromise prohibits slavery in Louisiana Purchase territory north of latitude 36° 30'.	1833-38 Britain outlaws slavery in its colonies, freeing 800,000 men, women, and children.	1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act repeals the Missouri Compromise and allows popular votes in territories to decide whether they will be slave territories or free.	1857 U.S. Supreme Court issues Dred Scott decision that blacks are not citizens of the United States and that Congress lacks authority to bar slavery from any territory.	1859 John Brown's raid.	1860 November 6: Lincoln is elected president of the United States.	1860 December 20: South Carolina secedes from Union, and six other states soon follow, joined by four more in May 1861.
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For decades before the Civil War, cooler heads in the South managed to keep fire-eaters under control. But two events changed that. The first was John Brown's famous raid. The second and more important was Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency.

JOHN BROWN'S RAID

Financially backed by a secret band of northern abolitionists, John Brown and 21 heavily armed white and black followers captured part of the federal weapons arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) on October 16, 1859.

Brown, a violent abolitionist who had fought to keep slavery out of Kansas, aimed to ignite a slave revolt in Virginia and establish a refuge there for escaped slaves. It was an inept plan in conception and execution. After two days, Brown and his followers surrendered to federal troops. He was tried for conspiracy, treason, and murder, and hanged on December 2.

Some northern newspapers extolled John Brown as a martyr to the cause of abolition. That set off howls of indignation among slaveholders.

Were abolitionists recruiting more raiders to start slave rebellions? Did a majority of northerners sympathize with John Brown's raid? In modern parlance, was there a network of "terrorists" preparing further attacks?

This was a time when the North's leading intellectuals—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Greeley, Henry David Thoreau, Harriet Beecher Stowe—were eloquent, full-throated abolitionists. They were small in number and politically marginal, even in New England, their home base, but serious people around the country

read their books and periodicals and debated their ideas.

Mary Chesnut was a close student and critic of abolitionist literature. In a November 1861 journal entry, she denounced those who live in "nice New England homes—clean, clear, sweet-smelling—shut up libraries, writing books which ease their hearts of their bitterness to us, or editing newspapers, [all of] which pays better than anything else in the world... What self-denial do they practice? It's the cheapest philanthropy trade in the world—easy. Easy as setting John Brown to come down here and cut our throats in Christ's name."

To southern planters, John Brown's raid was a reminder of past threats to their security and order. Slave revolts were rare but they terrified whites throughout the New



An 1856 daguerreotype of John Brown, the abolitionist who led the ill-fated raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

World.

In 1822, there was Denmark Vesey's alleged plot in Charleston. Vesey, a free black man, was charged with planning a slave rebellion throughout the city, and was hanged. Some historians now argue that Vesey was not a plotter but a victim of white hysteria. In 1831, moreover, the Nat Turner-led slave uprising killed at least 55 whites in Virginia.

The bloodiest slave uprising in the New World began in 1791 in the French sugar colony of St. Domingue (now Haiti). Caribbean sugar planters were notoriously savage slaveholders, working slaves to death. On St. Domingue, slaves rebelled against their masters, and subsequently fought invading armies of Spain, Britain, and France. Bloodshed continued in a civil war until 1804, when Haiti finally gained independence and peace.

On St. Domingue, there were unspeakable atrocities committed by Europeans and rebels alike, but only those by Africans were remembered among planters of the American South.

Mary, in her Charleston schoolgirl days, heard stories of St. Domingue violence from her émigré teachers. And Mary describes her mother-in-law's deep fear of slaves, having "in her youth the St. Domingo stories... indelibly printed on her mind. She shows her dread now by treating [slaves] as if they were a black Prince Albert or Queen Victoria."

To southern planters, John Brown's raid was an alarm that slaves, armed or inspired by abolitionists, could rise up. This fear was especially strong in South Carolina where blacks outnumbered whites, especially along the coast and the midlands. On many isolated plan-

1861 February 4: Seceded states meet in Montgomery, form the Confederate States of America, and elect Jefferson Davis president.	1861 April 12: Confederate attack on Fort Sumter begins Civil War.	1863 January 1: Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation and authorizes enlistment of blacks in Union armed forces.	1863 May-July: Black Union soldiers participate in battles at Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina, and in Louisiana.	1865 April 9: General Robert E. Lee surrenders at Appomattox Court House, Virginia.	1865 April 11: In his last public speech, Lincoln supports limited black suffrage in the South.	1865 April 14: Lincoln mortally wounded in assassination; dies following morning.
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tations, slaves outnumbered whites 10 to one, 100 to one, or more.

In October 1861, Mary Chesnut wrote anxiously, “Now we are here at Sandy Hill [her family’s summer retreat outside Camden]—half a dozen of whites or dominant class, sixty or seventy Negroes—miles away from the rest of the world.”

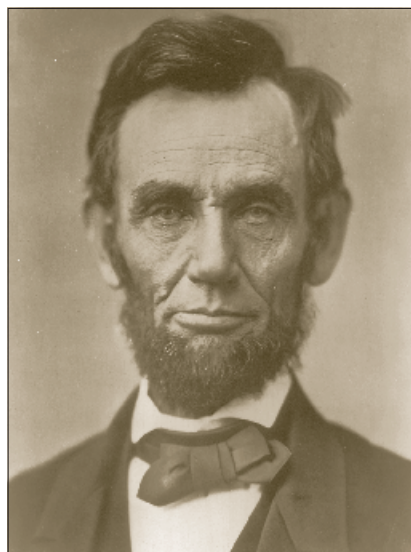
LINCOLN, THE REPUBLICAN

When Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860, the southern elite regarded it almost as an act of war, although Lincoln repeatedly declared that he did not intend to harm slavery in the South.

Lincoln’s Republican Party was founded in 1856 with the primary goal of keeping slavery bottled up in southern states where it might eventually die a natural death.

The North and South were each fighting for political advantage by trying to spread its labor system—free or slave—into U.S. territories faster than its adversary could. After all, each new state entering the Union would have two new U.S. Senate seats. The balance of power in the Senate—and eventually among U.S. Supreme Court justices, who were confirmed by the Senate—would be decided by which region had the most states, free or slave.

Leading Republicans argued that if slavery became further established in western territories, slaveholders would fight to protect their investments and prerogatives there just as they did in the South. It seemed virtually certain that any U.S. territory allowing slavery within its borders would eventually become a slave state, and that any territory outlawing it



President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 after two bloody years of war.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

would become a free state.

The industrializing North was already gaining ground in the U.S. House of Representatives because of its rapidly expanding population, while the South’s white population was stagnant. Each new state would send at least one representative to the House, the number depending on the state’s population size, which gave the North a crucial advantage in the House.

Northern skilled workers and farmers increasingly joined the anti-slavery movement, which was distinct from the abolitionist movement. In the decade before the Civil War, abolitionists demanded an immediate, uncompensated end to slavery everywhere.

The anti-slavery movement, by contrast, opposed the expansion of slavery and slaveholders’ rights beyond the South into U.S. territories and northern states. The anti-slavery movement also supported a gradual,

orderly elimination of slavery in the South with financial compensation to slaveholders. It was a movement embraced by artisans and other skilled workers who understood that they couldn’t compete against slave labor. Allowing human bondage to spread would undercut free workers’ wages, freedoms, and opportunities—and, just as important, their dignity. The new Republican Party became the political home for a new “free soil, free labor, free men” cause.

A free market for labor—that was Lincoln’s core belief throughout his political life. It was central to his conception of human rights. An American should have the right to own his labor and sell it where and how he wants, Lincoln declared.

In free states, Lincoln said, “the man who labored for another last year, this year labors for himself, and the next year he will hire others to labor for him.”

Of course, the plantation regions of southern states lacked free labor markets. In the South Carolina low-country, for instance, many slaveholders hired out their slaves as carpenters, bricklayers, and other occupations, driving down wages for free workers and inhibiting new enterprises.

Forty years before the Civil War, the number of slave states in the Union had already threatened to outstrip the number of free states. In 1820, Congress passed a law known as the Missouri Compromise to maintain a balance of power between North and South, establishing a border separating slave and free jurisdictions in the West. The compromise prohibited slavery in most of the Louisiana Purchase territory north of latitude 36° 30’, a region that eventually be-

came states or parts of states from Iowa west to Montana. In 1850, another compromise created a similar border farther west to the California line.

Under southern pressure, however, Congress in 1854 passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed these compromises. It allowed for a popular vote in each territory to determine whether slavery should be legally allowed there. Many northerners realized that it was an attempt to spread slavery throughout the entire West, including territories that had long been considered the domain of free labor.

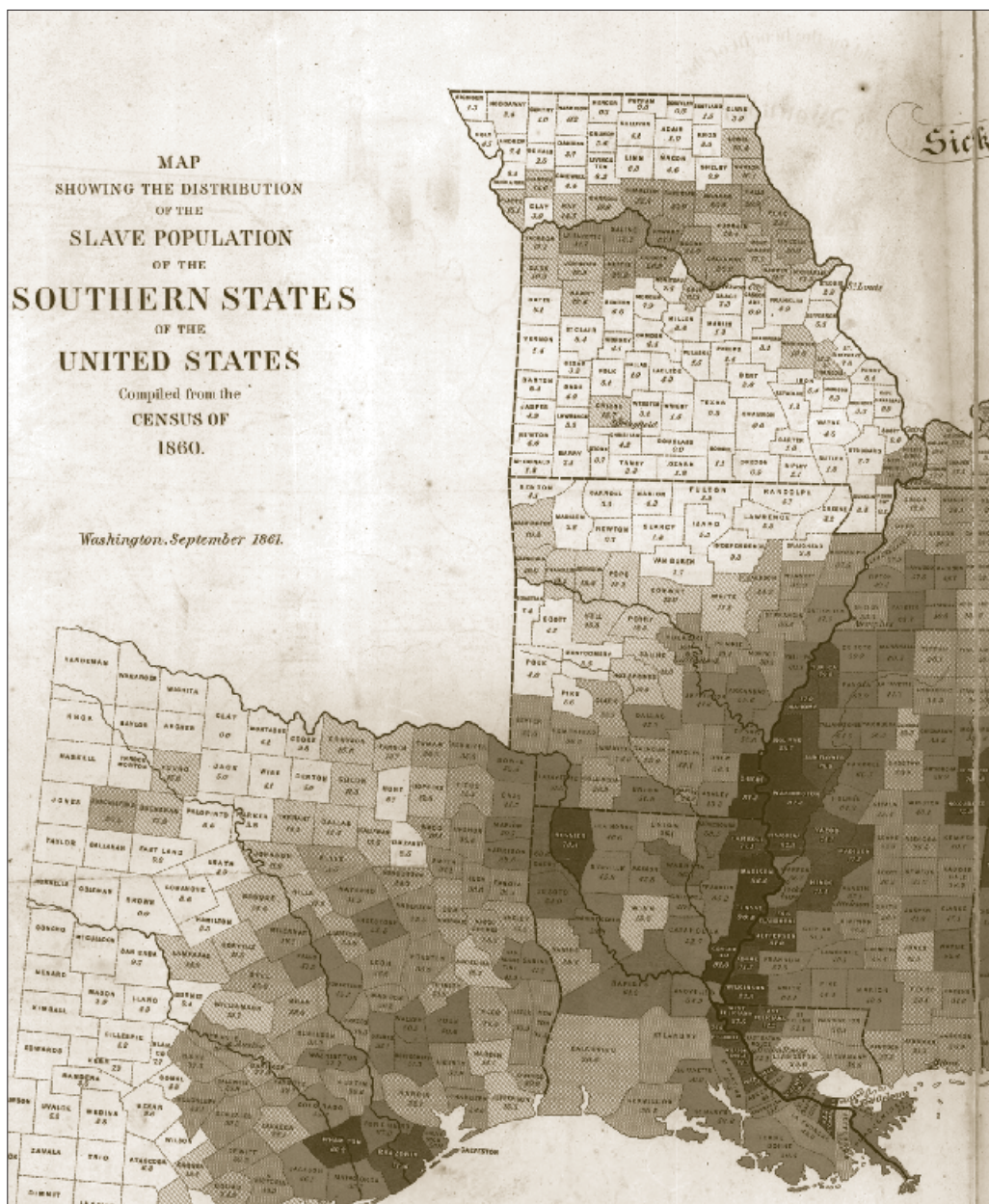
The Kansas-Nebraska Act provoked Lincoln's first forceful public statements against slavery. In a series of 1854 speeches, he condemned "the monstrous injustice of slavery," adding "no man is good enough to govern another man, *without that other's consent.*"

Still, Lincoln was a savvy politician with moderate instincts, and like many other men of the West, he was wary of abolitionists and criticized their "self-righteousness."

The South's increasingly aggressive tactics in courts and legislatures, however, continued to alienate many moderate Republicans. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court, dominated by southerners, decided in the Dred Scott case that blacks were not U.S. citizens and that Congress lacked constitutional authority to prevent racial slavery from any U.S. territory. President James Buchanan, in turn, declared that slavery existed in all the territories "by virtue of the Constitution."

Lincoln considered Dred Scott a travesty of justice, a "burlesque upon judicial decisions."

In the years leading up to the Civil War, Lincoln repeatedly asserted that he opposed slavery in the territories and northern states—but not in the South. He would stand his ground on the spread of slavery but would not interfere with slavery where it already existed.



This stance seemed a distinction without a difference to fire-eater secessionists who knew that the southern slave society had to expand into new areas to survive politically in the Union over the long term.

Lincoln's view of blacks in 1861 was typical of many critics of slavery. He could not imagine a time when millions of freed slaves would be fully integrated into American life. Blacks could never be social and political equals with whites, he said. Indeed, it was Lincoln's position that slave emancipation should be considered in concert with voluntary black colonization abroad to Africa, South

America, or the Caribbean. Many politicians had promoted colonization since the 1830s, though it had little practical traction. Few free blacks in the United States would agree to leave their native country.

Still, Lincoln said in 1858, "What I would most desire would be the separation of the white and black races." As late as his 1862 annual address to Congress, Lincoln declared, "deportation [of blacks], even to a limited extent, enhanced wages to white labor." When he spoke of deportation, he presumably meant voluntary colonization.

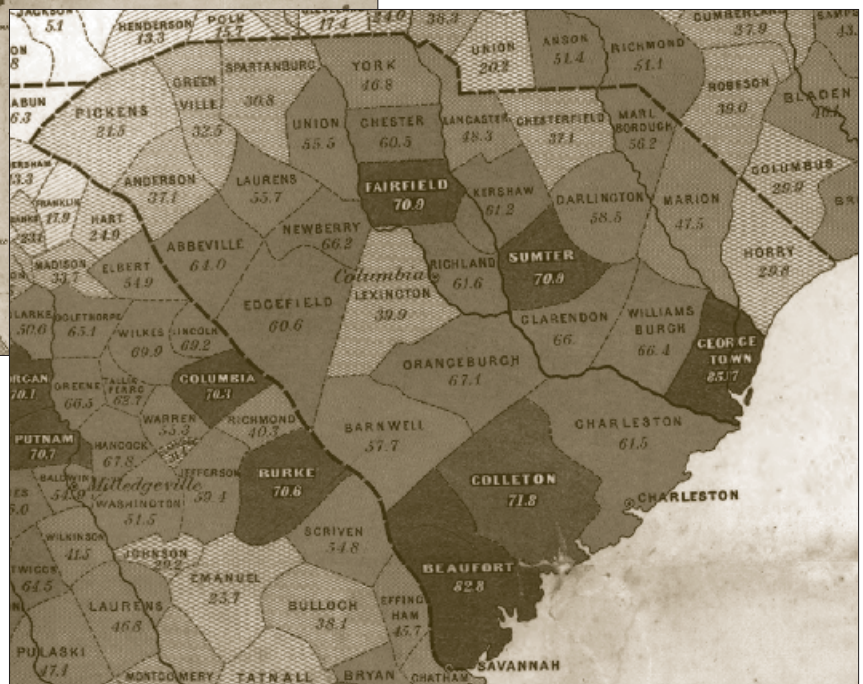
Abolitionists, black and white,



CAPTIVES. The 1860 Census was the last time the federal government counted the South's slave population. Later that year, the U.S. Coast Survey, which eventually became part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), issued this map of slavery in the South, and it captured the attention of President Abraham Lincoln, according to Susan Schulten, a historian at the University of Denver.

In the map, each county displays its proportion of slave population to its overall population in two ways: numerically and in shading (the darker the shading, the higher the proportion of slaves). Note that South Carolina enslaved a majority of its population.

With this map, Lincoln could visualize, region by region, the Confederacy's greatest economic and labor asset: slaves.
MAP/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



attacked Lincoln for his colonization ideas during the first years of the Civil War. "Pray tell us, is our right to a home in this country less than your own?" wrote one black man to the president. "Are you an American? So are we."

Why did many southerners, especially those in South Carolina, react violently to Lincoln's election in 1860?

Slave interests had dominated the federal government for generations. Fourteen of the first 18 presidents had been southerners or sympathetic to slave owners. Southern states had always held enough seats in the U.S. Senate to block any anti-slavery

bill. Lincoln's election, however, broke the southern grip on national government at a critical moment.

The Republican Party was America's first successful sectional political party, its members living almost exclusively in the North.

Indeed, Lincoln gained only 2% of the entire southern vote in 1860. To fire-eater secessionists, the rise of the Republican Party showed that the era of compromise between slave states and free states was finished, and that slavery would be doomed if the South



BLACK WARRIORS. In December 1865, Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, Fort Lincoln, guarded the District of Columbia.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

remained in the Union.

South Carolina's planter aristocracy was bitterly anti-Lincoln, although the new president was not an abolitionist as he stepped into office. In February 1861, Mary Chesnut condemned the president-elect and his political supporters as "that ogre Lincoln and rampant black Republicanism."

Days after South Carolina seceded from the Union, Lincoln asked Alexander H. Stephens, who would later become vice president of the Confederacy, "Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly, or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves?" Lincoln added, "There is no cause for such fears."

Lincoln was not yet the Great Emancipator whom Americans celebrate today.

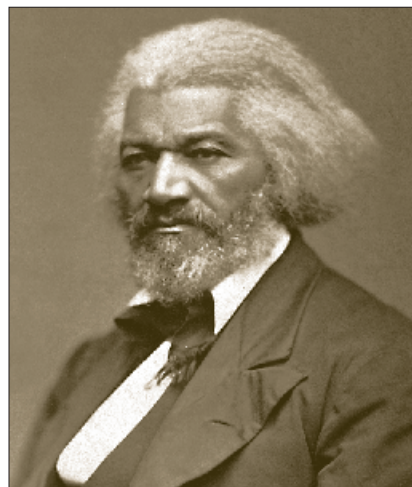
HOW THEY CHANGED

Mary Chesnut and Abraham Lincoln might have enjoyed one another's company if they'd had a chance to meet in another time and place. Despite their sorrows, both were fond of jokes, tall stories, and wordplay. Both were passionate readers and exceptionally skillful writers. They could laugh at themselves. They enjoyed warm friendships and family feeling. Each was a devoted spouse. Each was a steely adversary. Each

hated slavery. And earlier than most, both believed that slave emancipation would be a beneficial result of the war.

To her maid soon after Fort Sumter fell into Confederate hands, Mary Chesnut declared: "Now listen. Let the war end either way, and you will be free. We will have to free you before we get out of this thing." The South, she believed, couldn't hold slaves in captivity while also battling an invading Union army. Indeed, in the first months of the war, she was surprised that more slaves didn't run away to northern lines and perhaps join the Union effort.

But by the spring of 1862, a growing number of slave refugees did seek protection behind the Union battle lines, overwhelming the North's



Frederick Douglass urged President Abraham Lincoln to authorize black enlistment in the Union Army.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

capacity to house and feed them. Some northern officers actually sent runaway slaves back to their owners in the South.

This crisis moved many moderate Republican lawmakers in Congress to consider an action that had seemed impossible a year before—universal slave emancipation. The war was increasingly bloody, the South a fierce and capable enemy. Perhaps slave emancipation was the only way to undermine the South's slave-based economy and win the war.

In July 1862, Lincoln told his Cabinet that he was near to a conclusion to "free the slaves or be ourselves subdued."

In January 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in Confederate states and authorized black enlistment in Union armed forces. Lincoln soon dropped his emigration ideas, realizing that he could not ask black men to fight for the Union and press them later to leave the country. At least 180,000 black men served in the Union army during the war.

In July 1863, black soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment spearheaded an assault at Fort Wagner, on Morris Island, South Carolina. The assault failed to take the fort, but the regiment's soldiers were widely hailed for their courage, as were black fighters in other notable battles. Moved by their sacrifices, Lincoln called them his "black war-

riors” and acknowledged their contributions to Union victories. Lincoln’s “sense of blacks’ relationship to the nation began to change,” writes Eric Foner, a historian at Columbia University.

Lincoln by then was reaching out to black leaders, including the author, editor, and orator Frederick Douglass, to ask their advice. The president conferred with Douglass on how to increase recruitment of blacks into the Union army.

Douglass, early on, had bitterly criticized Lincoln for failing to attack the South and slavery with sufficient force and intensity. But by 1864 Douglass came to realize that Lincoln was experiencing a profound transformation in his view of blacks’ abilities.

Douglass came to admire Lincoln as a man. Reflecting on a visit to the White House, Douglass wrote that the president’s personal behavior and demeanor expressed an “entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race.”

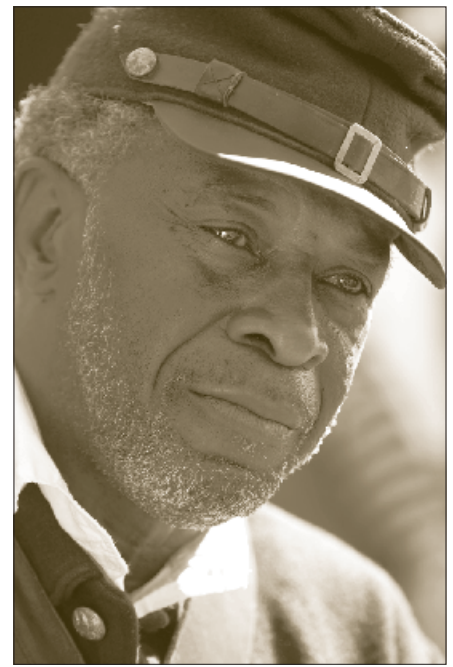
As the war reached a new stalemate that year, Lincoln was under intense pressure to retreat from abolition as a precondition for peace negotiations with the Confederacy. He

refused to do so, and he attacked those who “have proposed to me to return to slavery [these] black warriors ... to conciliate the South. I should be damned in time & in eternity for so doing.”

Two days after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, concluding the war, Lincoln spoke to an interracial crowd on the White House lawn. There he offered a startling proposal, calling for the enfranchisement of literate blacks and black Union military veterans in former Confederate states under control of the federal government.

Lincoln’s public endorsement of limited black suffrage was unprecedented by an American president. At that time, blacks could not vote in most northern states. Did Lincoln foresee a time when all black men in the United States could vote?

The actor John Wilkes Booth was in the crowd on the White House lawn. A radical southern partisan, Booth and a group of conspirators had planned to kidnap Lincoln and other top administration officials and demand release of southern prisoners of war. Later, the kidnapping plot was



LIVING HISTORY. About 180,000 black soldiers joined the Union army during the Civil War. Jules Washington, of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Civil War Reenactment Unit, commemorates their service. PHOTO/WADE SPEES

discarded in favor of assassination.

Booth was scandalized by Lincoln’s speech on the White House lawn. “That means [black] citizenship,” he supposedly said. “Now, by God, I’ll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make.”

Three days later, on April 14, 1865, Booth mortally wounded the president, who died the following morning.

News of Lincoln’s assassination softened Mary Chesnut’s view of her old enemy. In a journal entry in May 1865, she wrote, “Look at Lincoln now. How we used to hate him—abuse him, anyway. And now who is so base as to utter a word against the murdered president? No.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Did Mary Chesnut realize that she was a witness to history bending toward justice? In regard to slavery, yes. She was relieved by slavery’s demise. But she saw injustice in the Confederacy’s defeat. She could only watch “our world, the only world we cared for, literally kicked



COMBAT. This 1890 print depicts the storming of Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina, by the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. IMAGE/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

to pieces.”

The war was a catastrophe for southern planters who lost everything they fought for—and more. The Confederate elite aimed to preserve a society based on slaveholders’ rights and white superiority. The war, of course, concluded with slave emancipation throughout the United States and its territories, southern families and communities devastated, towns and farms in ruins, planters financially broken, and the South’s influence in the wider world gone up in smoke.

In Mary Chesnut’s journal entry of May 1865, she wrote, “We are scattered—stunned—the remnant of heart left alive within us, filled with brotherly hate.”

Hatred was Mary’s weakness.

During the war, she recognized the injustices of slavery, and she was justifiably proud of her kindness toward men and women who lived under her thumb. But when she revised her manuscript years after the war, she condemned blacks as a race, attacking them with crude, vitriolic language. As she aged, she became more sophisticated as a writer, but some part of her humanity shriveled.

Lincoln did not hate anyone. Instead, the Civil War broadened his empathy, awakening him to the human rights of all Americans. Born in Kentucky, a slave state, Lincoln did not overcome every racial misconception of his era, yet as president he advanced equality further than any before him. He was not an abolitionist in 1861, but



DEVASTATION. A bird’s eye view, looking south, of Circular Church on Meeting Street (right) in Charleston at the close of the Civil War.

PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

he embraced most abolitionist principles by the end of his life, inspired by his admiration of black soldiers who helped save the Union.

“I think we have reason to thank God for Abraham Lincoln,” wrote abolitionist Lydia Maria Child one week before he was assassinated. “With all his deficiencies, it must be admitted that he has grown continuously, and considering how slavery had weakened and perverted the moral sense of the whole country, it was great good luck to have the people elect a man who was *willing* to grow.”

Weeks after Lee’s surrender, Mary Chesnut visited her Camden plantation, the Hermitage, which had largely survived damage from Union troops. She was surprised to find her former slaves still at their posts. “Our people were all

at home—quiet, orderly, respectful, and at their work. In point of fact things looked unchanged. There was nothing to show that anyone of them had ever seen a Yankee or knew that one was in existence.”

But Mary knew her world had died; plantation slavery was finished. She was impoverished now. The long war had sobered and hardened her. She felt old, exhausted, at age 42.

Many of her friends and family, though, clung to a ghostly past. She closed her book with a July 1865 entry: “Eliza Lee describes various manners of bows. James Chesnut takes off his hat grandly, like a prince of the blood. Edward Boykin bows and smiles so cordially—you feel he is your friend... And—and the weight that hangs upon our eyelids—is of lead.” ♡



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A rich man's war, a poor man's fight

Why did so many impoverished southerners fight for the Confederacy? The majority of Confederate soldiers, including those from South Carolina, didn't own slaves. Indeed, many were subsistence farmers from sandhills and upland regions where the land was unsuitable for plantation slavery. Yet they felt patriotic kinship with slave owners.

By the Civil War, slaveholders had created an ideology that they spread across the South in sermons, speeches, newspapers, and schoolbooks. It was based on a notion that all blacks were children and that whites were responsible under God's plan to watch over them.

Slavery, in short, was required to protect Africans from themselves. Whites who failed to live up to their responsibilities were considered negligent.

"Slaveholders claimed that owning slaves always entailed a duty and a burden—a duty and burden that defined the moral superiority of the South," wrote David Brion Davis, a historian of slavery, in a 2006 book. "And this duty and burden was respected by millions of nonslaveholding whites, who were prepared to defend it with their lives."

Physical violence, in the form of whippings and beatings, was considered necessary to maintain order over children and slaves. "I hate slavery," the South Carolina diarist Mary Chesnut wrote in 1861. "I even hate the harsh authority I see parents think it their duty to exercise *toward their children*."

Many poor whites supported slavery because it seemed to offer a ladder to wealth and power. They "aspired to slave ownership, which was the mark of southern prosperity and success," writes British historian John Keegan in a 2009 book.

"Slave owners dominated southern politics, and it was by buying slaves that a southerner moved up the social tree, went from being a small to a large farmer and perhaps eventually a plantation owner." Some slaveholders had indeed begun as poor farmers and used the slave system to their advantage.

Many southerners, rich and poor, joined the war effort in 1861 because they thought it would be easy.

Southern men argued they would be braver and more skilled in battle than their Union counterparts. In his classic *Personal Memoirs*, published in 1885, Ulysses S. Grant recalled southerners' lobbying insults over the Mason-Dixon line. "They denounced northerners as cowards, poltroons, negro-worshippers, claimed that one southern man was equal to five northern men in battle, that if the South would stand up for its rights, the North would back down."

After a shaky start, however, Union armies proved resilient and determined, and they had huge advantages in manpower. In the 1860 census, the nation's white population of military age (men under the age of 30) was about 2.5 million in the North and about 900,000 in the South. About 360,000 Union men and 200,000 Confederate men died of battle wounds or disease during the war.

Confederate losses hit its ranks hard while the Union supplemented its forces with 180,000 black soldiers. By 1865,



PLUCKED. An unidentified Confederate soldier. Although they did not own slaves, many men from impoverished parts of the South fought for the Confederacy.

PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

black soldiers comprised about one-tenth of the Union military manpower.

Toward the end of the war, Mary Chesnut, living in Columbia, heard rumors of disgruntlement among soldiers from poor districts. "All of the troops from the mountainous parts of South Carolina, and from North Carolina's mountains, too, were disaffected. They wanted peace—said this was a rich man's war—they had no part nor lot in it, would gladly desert in a body."

There were large-scale desertions from Civil War armies, particularly on the Confederate side in the later years of the war. Even so, thousands of impoverished southerners fought to the end. John Keegan notes that it was fear of being called a coward—a prospect more horrible than death—that kept some soldiers, Confederate and Union, in the ranks year after year. ♡

NEWS & NOTES

University of South Carolina student awarded Knauss fellowship

Sierra Jones, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of South Carolina, has been awarded a John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship for 2011. She is serving as a congressional affairs specialist in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs.



Sierra Jones
PHOTO/SALLY WOODIN

Her task is to facilitate communications between NOAA scientists and Congress on a range of issues, including invasive

species, harmful algal blooms and hypoxia, education, and oceans and human health.

"I am greatly enjoying my current position at NOAA, primarily because of the interaction I have with both scientists and legislators," Jones said. "I would like to continue working in NOAA because I feel that it is an agency where there are opportunities to be involved in both research and policy. I love the mission of NOAA, and think that the work the agency conducts is vitally important to the nation."

To further the education of tomorrow's leaders, the National Sea Grant Office sponsors the John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship

Program, bringing a select group of graduate students to the nation's capital, where they work in the federal government's legislative and executive branches.

The students learn about federal policy regarding marine and Great Lakes natural resources and lend their scientific expertise to federal agencies and congressional staff offices.

Each of the nation's 32 Sea Grant programs can nominate up to six students to the Knauss fellows program each year. Selections are then made competitively from among those nominations. Visit www.scseagrant.org/Content/?cid=56 for more information about this program. ♡

College of Charleston student secures research fellowship

Jennifer Hein, a candidate in the Master of Science in Environmental Studies



Jennifer Hein
PHOTO/S.C. SEA GRANT
CONSORTIUM

Program at the College of Charleston, has been awarded a Coastal Research Fellowship for 2011.

The two South Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserves (North Inlet-Winyah Bay and ACE Basin NERRs) and the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium established this new fellowship for South Carolina-based graduate students with significant support provided through North Carolina Sea Grant. The fellowship is designed to foster collaborative re-

search with the two NERRs.

Hein will study and compare the impacts of an invasive parasitic species on American eel populations in each of the two NERRs and the more developed Cooper River. The invasive parasite, originally from East Asia, infects the swim bladder of American eels.

Hein will study eels collected by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources from the three sites. She speculates that the NERRs are healthy ecosystems that maintain healthier eel populations, which are more capable of resisting infections by this invasive parasite.

Her hypothesis is that eel populations from the three different sites, representing a range of development impacts, will exhibit different abilities to resist infection.

"I am very excited about this project," Hein said, "especially because I will be collaborating with so many different groups, including the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the NERRs, and Sea Grant. It's a great networking opportunity and an excellent chance to learn from experienced scientists and professionals."

For more information about the NERR-Sea Grant fellowship, contact Denise Sanger at Denise.Sanger@scseagrant.org or (843) 953-2078. ♡

Litter cleanup a success

Nearly 4,700 volunteers statewide participated in the 22nd annual Beach Sweep/River Sweep litter cleanup on September 18, 2010, clearing 24 tons of debris from beaches, marshes, and waterways. Organized by the S.C. Sea

NEWS&NOTES



College of Charleston students cleaned the marsh at Waterfront Park in downtown Charleston during the 2010 Beach Sweep/River Sweep.
PHOTO/S.C. SEA GRANT CONSORTIUM

Grant Consortium and S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the Sweep is held in conjunction with Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup.

Beach Sweep/River Sweep is funded primarily from private sources, and major sponsors include Applied Technology and Management, BP Cooper River Plant, Charleston City Marina, Charleston Water System, Coastal Expeditions, Mt. Pleasant Waterworks, S.C. State Ports Authority, The Duke Energy Foundation, and Walmart Market #34. The next statewide Sweep is scheduled for Saturday, September 17, 2011. ♡

Blue crab populations decline in saltier water

Although blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) are tough, hardy predators, they don't thrive in all coastal waters. Blue crabs prefer a certain amount of salt in their habitats—not too much but not too little, either. They grow

best in a zone of brackish estuary between higher salinities of ocean water and lower salinities farther up coastal rivers and creeks.

Over the past decade, however, the state's estuaries have turned saltier, and blue crabs are finding it more difficult to adapt to new conditions.

Sea Grant researcher Michael Childress, a marine ecologist at Clemson University, is studying how environmental changes are influencing this multi-million-dollar fishery in South Carolina.

The salinity of estuaries is the most important factor in predicting abundance of crabs in South Carolina, Childress said. When salt concentrations increase in estuaries, crab populations fall. This has implications for the future as sea-level rise continues to drive salty ocean water farther inland. Droughts, coastal development, and upland water usage also affect estuarine salinity.

From 1995 to 1998, South Carolina experienced higher-than-average rainfall totals, and crab landings increased to a peak of 7.5 million pounds. But over the next four years, 1999 to 2003, the state experienced a severe drought, and crab landings fell to 4.2 million pounds. Crab landings still have not recovered to pre-drought levels.

Childress is studying two hypotheses to explain the relationship between increased salinity in South Carolina estuaries and crab catches.

Crabs seasonally migrate upriver to find optimal salinity in locations beyond the state's regulatory boundary for the commercial fishery. So do crab landings decrease because commercial fishermen can't catch them? Or do landings decrease because crab popu-

lations decline throughout estuaries?

To answer such questions, Childress developed a computer model called the South Carolina Blue Crab Regional Abundance Biotic Simulation (SCBCRABS). This model attempts to address complex interactions between various habitats and life stages of the blue crab.

Childress uses the model to follow simulated individual blue crabs through time as they occupy habitats and encounter changing environmental conditions. The model is based on theoretical principles of population biology and environmental data.

In computer simulations, the population densities of blue crabs decreased in higher salinity waters. The animals had less prey to eat and greater crowding in the fewer sites of optimal salinity, so more crabs ate each other.

Do crabs permanently escape the fishery by swimming upriver? Probably not, Childress said.

"There is only a two to three month period during the late summer and early fall when crabs move far enough upriver that they can't be caught," he said. Usually by December, they move downriver to locations where they can be legally harvested.

In 2010, the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium awarded Childress a two-year research grant to conduct quarterly surveys of the blue crab population in the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). The project is a collaboration between Clemson University, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, ACE Basin NERR, S.C. Sea Grant Extension Program, local fishers, and the public. ♡

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Charleston, S.C.
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using soy-based ink.
Web site: www.scseagrant.org



EBBS & FLOWS

2011 National Aquaculture Extension Conference

*Memphis, Tennessee
June 5-7, 2011*

This conference is the only opportunity for extension aquaculture professionals nationwide to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate a professional growth and enhancement program that aims to improve personal performance and effectiveness. Many topics will be covered, including the new round of extension projects that were funded through the Aquaculture National Strategic Investment in 2010. For more information, contact Gene Kim at Gene.Kim@noaa.gov.

Coastal Zone 2011

*Chicago, Illinois
July 17-21, 2011*

Since 1978, Coastal Zone has been the premier international symposium on coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes issues. The conference is the largest gathering of coastal professionals, drawing 800-1,000 attendees. Presentations and discussions will center on four major themes: Planning for Resilient Coasts, Healthy Habitats, Great Lakes and Ocean Observing, and Vibrant Economies. Focus areas include governance and policy, implementation, measuring success, and outreach and engagement. Visit www.doi.gov/initiatives/CZ11/index.htm for more information.

4th National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration

*Baltimore, Maryland
August 1-5, 2011*

Mark your calendars for this interdisciplinary conference on large-scale ecosystem restoration, presenting state-of-the-art science and engineering, planning, and policy in a partnership environment. The conference brings together nearly 1,000 scientists, engineers, policymakers, and planners from across the country involved in ecosystem restoration. For more information, visit conference.ifas.ufl.edu/NCER2011 or contact Beth Miller-Tipton at bmt@ufl.edu.

Subscriptions are free upon request by contacting: Annette.Dunmeyer@scseagrant.org

ATTENTION SCHOOL TEACHERS! The S.C. Sea Grant Consortium has designed supplemental classroom resources for this and past issues of *Coastal Heritage* magazine. *Coastal Heritage Curriculum Connection*, written for both middle- and high-school students, is aligned with the South Carolina state standards for the appropriate grade levels. Includes standards-based inquiry questions to lead students through explorations of the topic discussed. *Curriculum Connection* is available on-line at www.scseagrant.org/education.